

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-03 H-02 INR-07 L-03

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FM AMEMBASSY LONDON

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2417

INFO AMEMBASSY BONN

AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS

AMEMBASSY COPENHAGEN

AMEMBASSY DUBLIN

AMEMBASSY THE HAGUE

AMEMBASSY LUXEMBOURG

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY ROME

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AMCONSUL BELFAST

AMCONSUL EDINBURGH

AMCONSUL LIVERPOOL

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PINT, PGOV, UK

SUBJECT: TORIES WIN WOOLWICH BY-ELECTION

1. TORY CANDIDATE, P. G. BOTTOMLEY, WHO HAS TWICE BEFORE STOOD AS CANDIDATE IN WOOLWICH WEST, WON BY-ELECTION JUNE 26 WITH MAJORITY OF ALMOST 2400 VOTES. OVER 62 PERCENT OF ELIGIBLE VOTERS CAST THEIR BALLOTS AND TORY VICTORY REPRESENTS A SWING FROM LABOR TO CONSERVATIVES OF 7.6 PERCENT.

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2. FORECAST HAD EARLIER BEEN FOR VERY CLOSE VOTE, AND

LEADERS OF BOTH PARTIES HAVE BEEN ACTIVE IN CAMPAIGNING. ALTHOUGH THERE WERE EIGHT CANDIDATES, BY-ELECTION WAS ESSENTIALLY CONTEST BETWEEN CONSERVATIVES AND LABOR. ALL SIX OTHER CANDIDATES LOST DEPOSITS AND LIBERAL SHOWING WAS PARTICULARLY WEAK.

3. USUAL CAVEATS ON IMPORTANCE OF BY-ELECTIONS APPLY TO WOOLWICH WEST, A CONSTITUENCY WHICH HAS RETURNED PARTY THAT FORMED THE GOVERNMENT IN ALMOST ALL GENERAL ELECTIONS FOR MORE THAN LAST 50 YEARS. WITH THIS RECORD, RESULTS ARE STRONG INDICATION THAT CONSERVATIVES MIGHT BE RETURNED TO POWER IN A GENERAL ELECTION NOW. IN THAT RESPECT, RESULTS ARE HELPFUL TO CONSERVATIVE LEADER, MARGARET THATCHER, WHO PARTICIPATED PERSONALLY IN CAMPAIGN, AND HAS BEEN SUBJECTED TO RUNNING CAMPAIGN OF LOW-KEY CRITICISM BY ERSTWHILE HEATH SUPPORTERS.

4. MAJOR ISSUES IN CAMPAIGN REVOLVED AROUND INFLATION, COST OF LIVING, RISING UNEMPLOYMENT, ETC. CONSERVATIVE SHADOW SPOKESMAN ON CONSUMER MATTERS, MRS. SALLY OPPENHEIM, TOLD EMBOFF ON JUNE 25 THAT CONSERVATIVES WOULD WIN IN WOOLWICH BECAUSE VOTERS WERE DISTURBED AT DETERIORATION OF THE NATION'S ECONOMY (MRS. OPPENHEIM ALSO CAMPAIGNED FOR BOTTOMLEY). EVEN SETTLEMENT OF THREATENED RAIL STRIKE DID NOT APPEAR TO HELP LABOR IN THIS COMMUTER COMMUNITY.

5. LABOR PARTY ACKNOWLEDGED THAT LOSS OF MARGINAL SEAT IN WOOLWICH SHOULD BE TAKEN AS A WARNING TO THE PARTY TO UNITE BEHIND MANIFESTO POLICIES, BEARING IN MIND SERIOUS ECONOMIC CONDITIONS NATION FACES. IN HIS STATEMENT, GENERAL SECRETARY OF THE PARTY, RON HAYWARD, ALSO NOTED THAT LOSS OF SEAT REDUCED GOVERNMENT'S PAPER MAJORITY TO ONE . (I.E. ABSENTEE PARLIAMENTARIAN STONEHOUSE), BUT NOTED THAT GOVERNMENT WOULD CONTINUE TO GOVERN SINCE OPPOSITION REMAINS FRAGMENTED AND DIVIDED.

6. ELECTION RESULT WILL ALSO DO NOTHING TO ENCOURAGE PRIME MINISTER TO CREATE FURTHER BY-ELECTION POSSIBILITIES THROUGH ELEVATION TO LORDS OF CABINET MINISTERS LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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(E.G. BARBARA CASTLE AND TED SHORT). FURTHERMORE, THE GOVERNMENT WILL LIKELY CONTINUE TO AVOID FINAL DECISIONS ON "L'AFFAIRE STONEHOUSE" AS LONG AS POSSIBLE.

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